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Camas looking to buy
Georgia-Pacific property
to rename and open as park



A small bird, its feathers blending with the lake's winter colors, perches on a log near the shore of Dead Lake.



Rain falls on 20-acre Dead Lake, more recently renamed Fallen Leaf Lake, in Camas, viewed from the north end in February. The lake and park may be open to the public for picnicking and hiking this summer or fall.

Photos by ZACHARY KAUFMAN/The Columbian

Resurrecting Dead Lake

By JOHN BRANTON
Columbian staff writer

CAMAS — Officials these days like to call Dead Lake by a much prettier name, Fallen Leaf Lake, perhaps to wave away the fogs of a dark, mysterious history.

Old-timers say swimmers used to become entangled in grass growing from the lake's bottom and drown, said Mayor Paul Dennis.

Another local man, who grew up in Camas, remembers kids being told not to swim there and that it was very deep.

There were rumors that Dead Lake's depth couldn't be measured — and that its drowning victims' remains couldn't be found.

And once there was a Dead Lake Cemetery nearby, also called Camas Catholic Cemetery. Its graves were moved to the Camas Cemetery in 1984, says the website, <http://www.MuseumStuff.com>.

In winter, at least, when the leaves of deciduous trees have fallen and are composting in the spongy mud, the lake does have a dank, murky look.

But it's a peaceful place if you walk across Northwest Lake Road from Camas Heritage Park, near the Moose Lodge, and down to the lakeshore.

You can hear a little creek flowing into the lake and, with your back turned to the road, you'll just see the lake, the shoreline and woods above it. You can feel your blood pressure drop a little.

On a rainy visit earlier this month, no one was at the lake, just a few ducks and other

birds.

But let's fast-forward to summer, when Fallen Leaf Lake and an enlarged Fallen Leaf Park, on the south end of the lake, may emerge as brighter stars. The new name will better fit the mood of the modern-day recreational crowd, including children, who soon will visit there.

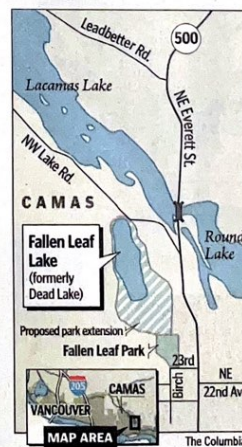
Long owned by Georgia-Pacific Corp. — and once reserved for the use of mill employees — the 20-acre lake on 55 acres of shoreline and woodland is being bought by the city of Camas for public use. Its value has been appraised at about \$2 million.

"It will remain a park," Mayor Dennis said of the property.

Dennis said outside developers have asked about the property but city officials resisted for years, wanting to make it part of the large system of natural habitat and waterfront park holdings around Lacamas Lake and Round Lake.

"It's such a beautiful setting, no one wants to see it developed and ruined," he said. "It's such a community gem."

Dennis hopes the deal will be finalized by summer or fall. Once that happens, the park will be opened so folks can use it for picnics



and hiking. Dennis said he didn't know what the lake's present angling opportunities are, but said it might later be stocked with fish.

So far, Dennis said, the city has been actively working to buy the property for at least two years.

"It's fully funded on our end," he said. "Very little will come directly from the city of Camas."

Several funding sources are being used, according to Dennis and the Camas-Washougal Post-Record:

■ A \$1 million grant from the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Program.

■ A grant of \$500,000 from the federal Land and Water Conservation fund.

■ A grant of \$380,000 from Clark County Conservation Futures.

■ The rest from Camas' Growth Management Act capital projects fund.

Some proceeds derive from a portion of property taxes that is small but adds up, the mayor said.

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